

18 COMMENTARY ON MACAULAY'S HISTORY

He goes on to explain that the sphere of history is a debateable land, partly ruled by reason and partly by imagination. A historian must possess a powerful imagination if he is to make his narrative sufficiently affecting and picturesque'. He must be a profound reasoner if he is to understand the relation of facts to each other and their relation to general principles. Leaving the general question, Macaulay at once plunges into a criticism of the Greek and Roman historians.

Herodotus he did not greatly admire—his book was an incomparable book' but hardly to be called a history. At most, he might be described as ^f the earliest and the best' of the romantic historians, and belonged to the same class as Froissart.¹ Xenophon Macaulay despised, and for Plutarch he entertained ^f a particular aversion'; the first was a dotard, and the second a pedant. As to the Latins, no historian was so indifferent to truth as Livy. He seems to have cared only about the picturesque effect of his book, and the honour of his country/² Sallust was a partisan: his account of the conspiracy of Catiline had ^s rather the air of a clever party pamphlet than that of a history \³

This is a rough summary of Macaulay's verdicts: they must not be taken as representing his final estimates of the writers in question.⁴

The real value of the essay is that it shows
that Macaulay

¹ Ibid. p. 332. ³ Ibid. p. 348. »Ibid. p. 349.

⁴ Of Sallust for instance he expressed a more favourable
judgement in
Ms journal a few years later. ' I think Sallust inferior to
both Livy and
Tacitus in the talents of an historian. There is a lecturing,
declaiming tone
about him which would suit a teacher of rhetoric better
than a statesman
engaged in recording great events. Still, he is a good
writer ; and the
view which he here gives of the state of parties at Rome,
and the frightful
demoralisation of the aristocracy, is full of interest.' June
10, 1835 ; May
6, 1837. Trevelyan, i. 468-9.